

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food Safety and Inspection Service

[Docket No. 98-045N]

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Food and Drug Administration

[Docket No. 97N-0074]

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

[Docket No. OPP-00550B; FRL-6087-7]

President's Council on Food Safety; Notice of Meeting

AGENCY: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA; Research, Education, and Economics, USDA; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HHS; Food and Drug Administration, HHS; Environmental Protection Agency.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The President's Council on Food Safety was established in August 1998 under Executive Order 13 100 to strengthen and focus our efforts to coordinate food safety policy and resources. The Council was directed to develop a comprehensive national food safety strategic plan. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are announcing a public meeting to discuss development of the plan. The purpose of the strategic plan is to reduce the annual incidence of acute and chronic foodborne and waterborne illness by further enhancing the safety of the nation's food supply. USDA, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and EPA have established public dockets to receive comments about the President's Council on Food Safety strategic planning process and the plan.

DATES: The meeting will be held on July 15, 1999, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Comments should be submitted by September 1, 1999.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at: The Washington Plaza Hotel, 10 Thomas Circle, Massachusetts Avenue and 14th Street, Washington, DC.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To register for this meeting, call Ms. Sheila Johnson on (202) 501-7305. Persons requiring a sign language interpreter or other special accommodations should notify Ms. Johnson by July 7, 1999.

For further information about the meeting, call Mr. Robert Tynan, of USDA, on (202) 205-7393 or e-mail: robert.tynan@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

On January 25, 1997, the President issued a directive to the Secretaries of USDA and HHS and the Administrator of EPA to work with consumers, producers, industry, States, Tribes, universities, and the public to identify ways to further improve the safety of our food supply, and report back to him in 90 days. The Federal food safety agencies, working with their colleagues in the States, in the food industries, in academia, and with consumers, initially focused on the goal of reducing illness caused by microbial contamination of food and water. This goal was to be reached through systematic improvements in six key components of the food safety system: Foodborne outbreak response coordination, surveillance, inspections, research, risk assessment, and education. The plan for meeting this goal was presented to the President in May 1997, in "Food Safety from Farm to Table: A National Food Safety Initiative."

In less than 2 years, the agencies have taken significant strides forward in building a strengthened national food safety system. Building blocks for the infrastructure are in place: Increased targeted surveillance through FoodNet and PulseNet; coordination of Federal, State, and local responses to outbreaks by the Foodborne Outbreak Response Coordinating Group (FORCG); expanded reliance on preventive controls (such as the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) based inspection systems for meat, poultry, and seafood, and Good Agricultural and Good Manufacturing Practices guidance for produce); coordination of Federal food safety research; cooperation on risk assessment through the interagency Risk Assessment Consortium; leveraging inspection resources; and innovative public and private partnerships. These efforts provide a common ground for moving forward.

In the May 1997 report, the food safety agencies made a commitment to prepare a 5-year comprehensive strategic plan, with the participation of all concerned parties. By Executive Order 13100, the President established the President's Council on Food Safety that will be responsible for development of a comprehensive strategic Federal food safety plan. A coordinated food safety strategic planning effort is needed to tackle some of the difficult public health, resource, and management questions facing Federal food safety agencies. Although microbial contamination will remain an area of emphasis, the strategic plan will address the full range of issues (e.g., chemical contamination, pesticides, food additives, and physical hazards) and actions necessary to ensure the safety of the food and water Americans use and consume. The charge is to develop a strategic long-range plan that can be used to help set priorities, improve coordination and efficiency, identify gaps in the current system and how to fill those gaps, enhance and strengthen prevention and intervention strategies and identify measures to show progress. In developing the plan, the agencies will consider the conclusions and recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences Report on "Ensuring Safe Food from Production to Consumption" and the review of Federal food safety research and the research plan currently being developed by an interagency working group under the auspices of the National Science and Technology Council.

The food safety agencies, as part of their work on the President's Council on Food Safety, have already taken the first steps to lay the groundwork for the development of the strategic plan by participating in interagency strategic planning sessions. The agencies also engaged consumers, producers, industry, food service providers, retailers, health professionals, State and local governments, Tribes, academia, and the public in the strategic planning process through a series of public meetings beginning in October 1998. The purpose of those meetings was to obtain the public's view on a long-term vision for food safety in the U.S. and to identify a strategic planning process that involves interested parties, addresses the important food safety challenges, and makes

the best use of agency resources. As a result of those public meetings, a vision statement is currently being revised. The revised vision statement will be available at the July meeting.

The Council has also developed a series of five draft food safety goals that create the framework for the food safety strategic plan. Each draft goal is accompanied by broad objectives designed to achieve that goal. The Council has chosen a twofold process using internal agency resources and external public comment involving all interested parties to review and refine the goals and objectives as well as to add more specific action items to the objectives.

First, the Council has designated five government agency planning workgroups to assist in the development of a final strategic plan. Each Workgroup will be responsible for the further development of one of the goals and its objectives within the plan. Under the guidance and direction of the Council, each Workgroup will perform the following tasks for its assigned goal statement and objectives:

- Refine the goals and objectives provided by the Council.
- Develop the next level of action items for the plan.
- Assist in the preparation and presentation of public and stakeholder meetings related to the planning process by: Developing appropriate discussion questions related to the goal; participating in breakout sessions concerning the goal; and reviewing and incorporating appropriate public comments into the plan.

Second, the Council wants to engage all interested stakeholders in the development of the actual plan as it did in the earlier dialogue surrounding the agencies' vision for the U.S. food safety system and the roles of all those involved. The Council is planning two public meetings during the summer and fall of 1999 to share the draft plan and obtain public input. In addition, the Council is considering engaging in a series of three to five stakeholder meetings to take place in conjunction with scientific or professional conferences scheduled over the next 6 to 9 months.

The first public meeting is scheduled for July 15, 1999, at the Washington Plaza Hotel in Washington, DC. The purpose of the July 15th meeting is to obtain the public's input on the draft goals and objectives, as well as to provide comments and suggestions on specific action items for inclusion in the plan. The meeting is intended to be a working meeting; therefore, the agenda will follow almost exclusively a breakout session format. The breakout sessions will be organized around the goals and objectives and include members of the agency planning workgroups to lead and facilitate discussions. The workgroups are currently developing several illustrative action items and questions concerning the goals and objectives to encourage and focus participant comments during the breakout sessions. The agenda will be designed to obtain the maximum input from the participants with a minimum of reporting during the meeting from the breakout groups. Summaries of all discussions will be available within 30 days from the end of the public meeting. The second fall public meeting will be announced in the **Federal Register** prior to the date of the meeting. This meeting will obtain public input on a more refined draft of the strategic plan.

The draft goals and objectives to be discussed at the meeting are as follows:

Draft Inter-Agency Food Safety Strategic Plan--Goals and Objectives

Overarching Goal: To protect public health by significantly reducing the number of foodborne illnesses through science-based and coordinated regulation, inspection, enforcement, research, and education programs.

Goal 1: Ensure the development and use of a comprehensive scientific and technological food safety knowledge base to support prevention, regulation, inspection, surveillance, and education programs.

Objectives:

- Develop a national food safety research and technology infrastructure.
- Develop and improve data, methods, models, and measures to assess health effects, including a better understanding of the factors that affect sensitivity to foodborne illness (e.g., age and health status).
- Develop new and improve existing data, methods, models, and measures to assess exposure, including improved analytical and surveillance methods.
- Develop better, integrated (uniform) national and international risk assessment capability and conduct risk assessments.
- Develop and improve prevention/control methods and risk management practices through better integration of research.
- Coordinate and evaluate research on the highest priority food safety issues and efficiently leverage Federal agencies' research resources.
- Develop adequate technological support, including advanced modeling technology, for risk assessment and risk management.

Goal 2: Improve the effectiveness of surveillance, outbreak investigation, and response.

Objectives:

- Enhance and expand foodborne disease and hazard monitoring and surveillance systems.
- Identify, investigate, and track the causes of foodborne infections to determine sources and exposed populations.
- Provide better information to health professionals and physicians about the causes and effects of foodborne illness to more effectively detect and treat these illnesses.
- Improve outbreak coordination and investigation amongst Federal, State, and local agencies for more efficient, effective responses to foodborne contamination and illness.
- Strengthen and expand traceback, intervention, and recall capability; improve coordination on tracebacks and recalls.

Goal 3: Identify and manage food safety risks through protective standards, inspection, and enforcement from farm to table.

Objectives:

- Improve the safety of the nation's food supply to protect public health to the greatest extent possible through priority- and science-based standards, guidance, and other measures, including effective food safety management strategies by processors and providers.

- Develop and implement preventive techniques and controls.
- Ensure priority-based effective and efficient monitoring and inspection of the food supply.
- Protect our food supply in accordance with U.S. statutes and where appropriate internationally recognized science-based standards.
- Ensure contaminated water will not contaminate food during its production, processing, or reconstitution.

Goal 4: Ensure that all people who come into contact with food from farm to table are fully informed of the risks and measures to prevent or reduce foodborne illnesses.

Objectives:

- Foster basic understanding of food safety principles.
- Enhance the public's timely accessibility to accurate information that will help them make informed decisions about their food and the risks.
- Provide education and information to eliminate unsafe food handling practices at each point in the food chain (producers, processors, transporters, preparers, retailers, and consumers).
- Improve communication and information to the public so that they are informed about foodborne illness incidences, but are not unduly alarmed.

Goal 5: Create a national and to the extent possible an international seamless food safety system from farm to table.

Objectives:

- Ensure a complete set of Federal statutory authorities for an effective, prevention-based food safety system, including authorities for information collection and dissemination, rulemaking, inspection, enforcement, and expedited review of food safety technologies.
- Develop and implement a seamless Federal food safety system that supports effective regulation and administration of food safety programs.
- Coordinate and integrate Federal, State, and local actions to provide efficient, effective, and timely protection of the food supply and eliminate gaps by focusing and delivering resources where they are needed.
- Optimize use of available food safety resources at all levels of government to carry out the monitoring, inspections, outbreak response, traceback, and training necessary for an appropriate level of public protection nationwide.
- Enhance international understanding and acceptance of food safety standards that are in accordance with U.S. statutes and international trade agreements.

The workgroups are continuing to refine these goals, objectives, and action items in preparation for the July 15th meeting. Therefore, the material distributed at the meeting may differ slightly from the information provided in this Notice.

II. Public Dockets and Submission of Comments

The Agencies have established public dockets for the President's Council on Food Safety Strategic Plan. Comments submitted to the dockets are to be identified with the appropriate docket number. For those comments directed to USDA, use Docket No. 98-045N, and for comments directed to FDA, use Docket No. 97N-0074. Commenters are encouraged to submit a disk with their written comments in WordPerfect 5.1/6.1 or ASCII file format. Submit written comments (in triplicate) to:

USDA/FSIS

USDA/FSIS Hearing Clerk, 300 12th Street, SW., Rm. 102 Cotton Annex, Washington, DC 20250-3700.

FDA

FDA/Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305), 5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061, Rockville, MD 20852.

Electronic Comments

Comments may also be submitted electronically to: oppts.homepage@epa.gov. All comments and data in an electronic format must be identified by the docket number OPP-00550. Electronic comments must be submitted as an ASCII file avoiding the use of special characters and any form of encryption.

Meeting Summaries

Summaries of the public meeting will be posted on the Internet at: www.foodsafety.gov. This website is a joint FDA, USDA, and EPA food safety homepage. It is linked to each agency for persons seeking additional food safety information. Summaries of the public meeting may also be requested in writing from the Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305), FDA, 5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061, Rockville, MD 20852, approximately 15 business days after the meeting at a cost of 10 cents per page. The summaries of the public meeting will be available for public examination at the above-mentioned office between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays.

The public docket in its entirety will be available on the Internet at: <http://www.epa.gov/opptsfrs/home/rules.htm#docket>.

List of Subjects

Environmental protection, Food safety.

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Dated: June 14, 1999

Catherine E. Woteki

Catherine E. Woteki,

Undersecretary for Food Safety, United States Department of Agriculture.

Dated: June 14, 1999

James A. O'Hara

James A. O'Hara,

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, Department of Health and Human Services.

Dated: 6/14/99

Susan H. Wayland

Susan H. Wayland,

*Acting Assistant Administrator for Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances,
Environmental Protection Agency.*